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SUBJECT: Ramadan 2005 Public Diplomacy Strategy

REF: MANAMA 01292

1. Summary: Ramadan presents an opportunity to promote mutual understanding, support democratic dialogue and demonstrate respect for religious traditions in Bahrain. It is also an opportunity to show a side of America that listens and has a voice of its own in matters of faith. Programs will include the Ambassador's nightly visit to Ramadan majlis (social salons), a traditional Iftaar dinner with local contacts, a speaker program featuring an American Imam, a women's event at the DCMs, and a food-drive for charity. End Summary.

2. The key to Embassy Manama's 2005 Ramadan Strategy is outreach. We are seeking to engage a broad range of contacts and reach deep into Bahraini society, particularly among youth and women. Participating in traditional cultural events such as the majlis, the Iftaar and women's Ghabqa shows sincerity in our respect for Islam, and establishes a setting where dialogue can take place. It shows our desire to build closer relations with our Bahraini friends and colleagues, including reaching beyond elites. Our visiting U.S. speaker, Imam Yahya Hendi of Georgetown University, will reflect Islam's role in American contemporary culture and religion, and lay the groundwork for further engagement and exchanges involving religious leaders in Bahrain. The CLO food drive shows American generosity in the context of the zakat, or charity, that is one of the five pillars of Islam. The Ramadan strategy directly supports mission program goals of increasing mutual understanding through outreach to foreign audiences.

Ambassador and Embassy to visit Ramadan Majlis

3. The Ambassador will lead a team of Embassy officers on a nightly round of visits to Ramadan majlis hosted by prominent Bahrainis. On average, they will visit five to six majlis per evening for the first three weeks of Ramadan. These majlis provide a unique opportunity for the Ambassador and Embassy staff to have hundreds of encounters with Bahrainis, from the senior most level to average citizens, during a month of great religious significance for Muslims. While the visits are social, they offer an opportunity - in addition to showing respect for Ramadan - to engage with a wide range of Bahrainis on domestic and international concerns, including democratic reform, civil society, and Iraq.

Muslim American Speaker Program

4. In mid-October, post will host U.S. speaker Imam Yahya Hendi, of Georgetown University. His program includes participation in a majlis at the Grand Mosque in downtown Manama, meeting with key religious figures, a public lecture to youth leaders, and giving the convocation at an Iftaar dinner held at the Ambassador's residence. The Iftaar will include a diverse audience of religious, cultural, political, and civil society leaders. The Bahraini Ministry of Islamic Affairs is helping design a program for Imam Hendi and getting him center-stage in local Ramadan activities. We are planning for major press coverage. Note: This initial program lays the foundation and creates linkages for a special IV program post will request for FY 2006 in septel (Ref A).

Women's "Ghabqa"

5. DCM will host a traditional Ramadani late meal for women, with audience from Bahraini civil society, human rights, ministries, royal family, and embassy community. This event will show our continuing support for the empowerment of women in Bahraini civil society. Women journalists and opinion-leaders will also be invited.

Food-Drive

6. In respect for Islam's special emphasis on zakat, or

charity, during Ramadan, Manama CLO will spearhead a food drive, and will accept food and cash donations for the needy.

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